



December 6, 2018

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary  
Office of the Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 18-336 and CC Docket No. 92-105 regarding the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018.

Dear Madam:

The United Way of Westchester and Putnam and its Hudson Valley 2-1-1 appreciate the opportunity to comment on the current effort undertaken by the Federal Communications Commission to study the feasibility of designating a three-digit number to the National Suicide Hotline and to assess the effectiveness of the current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. In Westchester and Putnam Counties, in NYS, our United Way is committed to helping local residents be self-sufficient and thrive in a stronger community. 2-1-1 is integral and essential to achieving this goal. The Hudson Valley 2-1-1 region is made up of seven counties and has a policy board comprised of United Ways, government, not for profit providers and other experts. Currently, a retired Mental Health Commissioner chairs the Policy Board and a current Mental Health Commissioner from another county, sits on both the Policy Board and the United Way of Westchester and Putnam Board. In addition, via contractual arrangements, Hudson Valley 2-1-1 takes calls in the United Way of Westchester and Putnam offices, for 24 counties in NYS.

We acknowledge efforts are needed to create a safe place for all people to call – especially underserved or marginalized populations such as seniors, people with physical or intellectual disabilities, people that identify as LGBTQ+, Veterans, American Natives, non-English speakers, and individuals facing complex problems such as substance/opioid use, human trafficking, and domestic violence. We also recognize that as well as addressing the crisis calls, it is necessary to address the underlying problems that may be contributing to the crisis of suicidal thoughts. Our organization has a 55 history of reaching out to the underserved and today we partner with hundreds of businesses, nonprofit agencies, government stakeholders to drive systemic changes to solve our community's toughest problems like mental health and crisis. In fact our 2-1-1 call specialists are already trained to respond to crisis calls and Hudson Valley 2-1-1 is the designated crisis call center for one of our counties. We currently receive about 360 crisis calls per year to 2-1-1, from the dedicated Putnam County crisis line. In addition, we take over 1000 crisis calls from the other counties in our catchment area.

## UNITED WAY OF WESTCHESTER & PUTNAM

PHONE 914.997.6700  
WEBSITE UWWP.ORG

ADDRESS 336 CENTRAL PARK AVENUE  
WHITE PLAINS, NY 10606



Our 2-1-1 call center is open 24/7, 365 days per year and can respond to callers having 200 languages and dialects. Data analysis of calls helps United Way to determine where and what additional services may be needed in our counties and United Way then convenes our partners to address those gaps. In the next couple of weeks, a text feature will be operational, to provide an additional way for caller to connect to service or support and will provide a means for delivering outbound messages of encouragement as well as reminders.

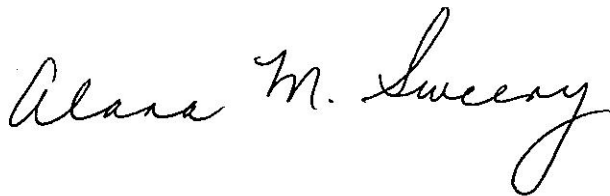
We encourage the FCC to consider our 2-1-1 work here in Westchester and Putnam as a vital partner in increasing access to suicide prevention and intervention services. Since the FCC designation of 2-1-1 in 2000, United Ways in the Hudson Valley Region have contributed approximately \$20 million in direct support and contracts to the success of 2-1-1, which enables us to answer 80,000 requests for help each year. Moreover, each year our United Way invests in mental health, substance use, health, education, and other financial stability services to provide access and strengthen the community. These critical investments position us to be key partners in the success of an improved mental health and crisis response system.

Another three-digit code may erode the simplicity of a single point of access for community help. Despite concerted efforts by numerous social services, and multiple hotlines, in our community to educate and market the distinctions, a person in crisis will likely always reach for the most familiar or most accessible number. Our 2-1-1 receives calls that are better suited for 911, and our 911 partners often receive calls that we can best answer. We have already developed strong relationships, protocols and MOUs with local emergency services agencies and mental health providers and we currently work routinely with federal, state and local agencies for coordination of services and response.

We recommend that resources should be invested to improve a unified single point of access with a blended partnership of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and United Way's 2-1-1 services. We believe in the power of partnership to address gaps, not duplicate services, and will be a valuable partner in the fight against suicide.

You can learn more about our work at [www.uwwp.org](http://www.uwwp.org) and [www.hudson211.org](http://www.hudson211.org) as well as reach my office for additional questions or discussion at 914-997-6700 ext 716. Thank you for your time in addressing this important issue and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alana M. Sweeny". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alana Sweeny  
President/CEO  
United Way of Westchester and Putnam